



## Aruba's Red Cross celebrates their golden jubilee anniversary

On Saturday evening, May 24, Greg Peterson, president of the Aruba Overseas Chapter of the International Red Cross welcomed Lt. Governor of Aruba, Christina van den Berg-de Freitas and a number of local dignitaries to a gala event at the Renaissance Convention Center. It was an evening of celebration and information for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Red Cross in Aruba.

International speakers at the event were Dr. Cees Breederveld, Director of the International Red Cross of the Netherlands, and U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Henry Polczer, Commander of FOLS in Curacao. Both provided fascinating insights into the beginnings, history, and present day role of the International Red Cross/Red Crescent organization.

During February of 1863, upon the urging of Henri Dunant, the *Société genevoise d'utilité publique* [Geneva Public Welfare Society] set up a committee of five Swiss citizens to look into the ideas offered in Dunant's book, *Un Souvenir de Solferino* – suggestions for protection of the sick and wounded during combat. This eventually evolved into the International Red Cross, an organization that has been awarded four Noble Peace Prizes since its inception. It now counts over 200,000 workers that help millions of disaster victims annually.

Resulting from the 1863 Conference, which hoped to see its Red Cross principles become a part of international law, an international diplomatic meeting was held at Geneva the following year at the invitation of the Swiss government. The assembly formulated the Geneva Convention of 1864. This international Convention for the Amelioration of the "Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field," included provisions guaranteeing neutrality for medical personnel and equipment and officially adopting the red cross on a field of white as the identifying emblem. It was signed on August 22, 1864, by twelve states and was later accepted by virtually all. Clara Barton is most famous for establishing the Red Cross in the United States in 1882.

Dr. Breederveld explained that Aruba is one of six autonomous overseas entities under the Red Cross of the Netherlands. He applauded the Aruba Red Cross for their performance after the effects of Hurricane Ivan in 2004, and the Aruban citizens for their fund raising efforts during that crisis. He also reminded the gathering that Red Cross financial support cannot only be reactive, but must be *pro-active*, providing sufficient materials and personnel to handle any mass disasters that could possibly occur. To this end, he presented a substantial donation to Greg Peterson, and promised that if the Government of Aruba would financially support their local Red Cross Chapter, then the Red Cross of the Netherlands would co-finance this effort.

Following Dr. Breederveld to the podium was Lt. Colonel Henry Polczer, who further detailed the history of the Red Cross, in particular the long-standing partnership of the organization with relief efforts by American military. This was illustrated with a video featuring the song "American Soldier" by country/western singer Toby Keith. Afterwards, Marck Oduber, Aruba's Head Meteorologist, informed the gathering that this year hurricane season is expected to be particularly active, with more storms of greater consequence, and Aruba, along with all the other islands, should be prepared.

Finally, Greg Peterson took the stage to extol the accomplishments of Aruba's Red Cross and to applaud the work and determination of the volunteers that donate their time. Bouquets of flowers were presented to individuals who have been instrumental to its success, which included one of the founders, Jean Baiz, and Past President Erlinda Leysner. Additionally receiving bouquets were the Commander of the Red Cross Volunteers, Marieta Wanopa, and administrator Melva Leysner. Indra Anthony of ECA Communications Group and the Neme brothers of I LOVE MUZIKA were also honored for their efforts in bringing attention to the Red Cross and raising funds.

Greg had a special gift for Aruban Roger Peterson, lead singer of the internationally popular band Intwine, which produced a video titled "Peace of Mind" that honors the work of the Red Cross, and is being aired on international television. During the celebration, the audience was treated to a showing of this video. Based out of Holland, Intwine visits Aruba annually to film video clips, and during this year's visit performed two concerts in cooperation with I LOVE MUZIKA to raise funds for the Red Cross of Aruba.

The evening ended with a standing ovation for the hard working Red Cross volunteers of Aruba, and a congenial wine and cheese party. For information about Aruba's Red Cross, the classes they provide in CPR and First Aid, and to make donations contact Marieta Wanopa at either 582-1471 or 963-2903. THE NEWS congratulates and thanks Aruba's Red Cross for fifty years of service to the community!